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ABSTRACT

Recent concern about teacher shortages has raised questions about the attractiveness of the teaching profession. This issue brief examines whether teacher salaries have increased in recent years, how they compare with salaries in other entry-level occupations, and how they vary within and across school districts in the nation. Data on scheduled teacher salaries for school years 1987-88 and 1990-91 were obtained from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), a nationally representative sample of public school districts. Findings indicate that teacher salaries are important indicators of the relative economic well-being of teachers and of general teacher supply-and-demand conditions in the United States. First, teacher salaries kept pace with the increase in the cost of living during 1988-91. Second, although teachers may find higher salaries in certain regions of the country and in the larger school districts, entry-level teacher salaries are not competitive with salaries paid in other entry-level positions. Third, the real cost in salary to new bachelor degree recipients who choose a teaching career, particularly for those in computer science, mathematics, and physical sciences, remains high. Three tables are included. (LMI)

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Teacher Salaries - Are They Competitive?

Recent concern about teacher shortages has raised questions about the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Some argue that increasing teacher salaries would make teaching more attractive and competitive with other professions and would improve recruitment and retention of better qualified teachers. It is of interest, therefore, whether teacher salaries have increased in recent years, how they compare with salaries in other entry level occupations, and how they vary within and across school districts in the Nation. The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) provides data from a nationally representative sample of public school districts on scheduled teacher salaries for school years 1987-88 and 1990-91 to answer these questions.

Have teacher salaries increased?

After declining in the 1970's and rising in the 1980's, teacher salaries in 1988, adjusted for inflation, reached the high they had attained in 1972 (Condition of Education, 1992). Between 1988 and 1991, however, salaries leveled off, keeping pace with inflation. Adjusted teacher salaries at the two entry bachelor and master degree steps remained the same, and increased only slightly at the third reported step (Table 1).

Table 1.--Average scheduled teacher salaries by degree and years of experience for school years 1987-88 and 1990-91 in constant 1991 dollars

	Bachelor's and 0 years	Master's and 0 years	Master's and 20 years	Highest Salary
1988[1]	$19,860	$21,740	$32,849	--
1991	19,913	21,698	33,199	$36,065

[1]1988 salaries adjusted using the Consumer Price Index of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

How do teaching salaries compare with salaries of other professions?

Salary is one consideration in the choice of college major and occupation. In most occupations, salaries differ depending on the supply and demand conditions in the particular field. In teaching, however, salaries are the same regardless of the field of specialization. Thus, the choice of a new college graduate to teach or to work in another occupation may have a cost in terms of the difference in salary. A consideration that may compensate for differences in salary is length of the contract year, typically shorter for teaching than for other occupations. The 1990-91 Survey of Recent College Graduates provides entry level salary data for new bachelor degree recipients in non-teaching occupations one year after graduation.

Table 2.--Average annual salaries of new bachelor degree recipients in teaching and other selected occupations, 1990-91

Occupation	Salary	Difference
Teaching	$19,913[1]	--
Computer Science	30,419	$10,504
Math, Physical Sciences	26,040	6,125
Business/Management	25,961	6,046
Writers/Artists	22,353	2,438
Biologists	21,325	1,410
Communications	19,584	-329
Public Affairs/Social Services	19,227	-686
All occupations	23,632	3,717

[1]Scheduled salary based on average contract length of 9.7 months.

New bachelor degree recipients in the fields of computer sciences, math and physical sciences, and business and management, who choose to teach, do so at considerable financial cost ($6,000 to $10,000) (Table 2). The same is true for those in letters and fine arts (writers and artists), although to a lesser extent. Graduates in the fields of biology and communications who choose teaching are not penalized financially for their decision; and those in public

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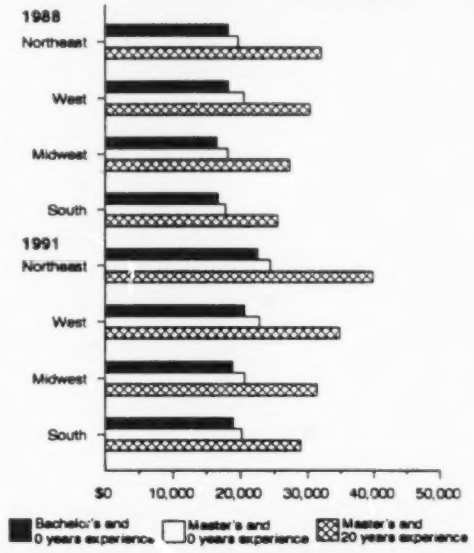
affairs or social services realize a small financial advantage in teaching. Salary data from the same survey of recent college graduates conducted in 1987, adjusted to constant 1991 dollars, indicate that the relative standing of teaching versus other entry level professions has not changed over those 4 years.

How do public school teacher salaries compare across steps in the salary schedule and across school districts in the Nation?

In addition to salary differences across professions, teacher salaries vary by steps, and across districts, by geographic location and size. The average teacher salary in 1991 at the highest level was 181 percent of that at the entry level, with increases at each reported step (Table 1). In 1988 the Northeast and West shared the highest rank for salaries (Figure 1). By 1991, the Northeast had moved ahead of the West at all reported steps. As in 1988, salaries in the Northeast and West remained ahead of those in the Midwest and South. The Midwest and South pay equivalent salaries at the entry bachelor's step, but the Midwest pays higher salaries than the South at the higher steps.

The larger the district (up to 5,000 students and more) the higher the salary at all reported steps (Table 3); and as the steps increase so too do the differences in salaries. At the entry level bachelor's and master's steps, salaries increase by about 15 percent from the smallest to largest districts. At the more advanced steps, salary increases ranged from 24 to 32 percent from the smallest to the largest districts.

Figure 1.--Scheduled teacher salaries for 1988 and 1991 by step and by region



Conclusion

Teacher salaries are important indicators of the relative economic well-being of teachers and of general teacher supply and demand conditions in the Nation. Over this 3-year period teacher salaries have kept pace with the increase in the cost of living. And while teachers may find higher salaries in certain regions of the country and in the larger school districts, entry level teacher salaries are not competitive with salaries paid in other entry level professions. The real cost in salary to new bachelor degree recipients of choosing teaching as a career, particularly for those in the fields of computer science, math and physical sciences, remains high.

Table 3.--Scheduled teacher salaries by step and by district size, 1990-91

	Bachelor's and 0 years	Master's and 0 years	Master's and 20 years	Highest Salary
District Size				
0-999	$19,001	$20,649	$30,557	$32,478
1,000-4,999	20,691	22,570	35,644	39,269
5,000-9,999	21,487	23,601	37,384	41,960
10,000 or more	21,829	23,962	37,728	42,842

For more information, see the following reports

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *1991 Schools and Staffing Survey, Sample Design and Estimation* (NCES 93-449), by S. Kaufman. Washington, D.C.: 1993.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Occupational and Educational Outcomes of 1989-90 Bachelor's Degree Recipients 1 Year after Graduation: 1991 (NCES 92-162), Washington, D.C. 1993.

Issue Briefs present information on education topics of current interest. All estimates shown are based on samples and are subject to sampling variability. All differences reported are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error.

This Issue Brief was prepared by Mary Rollefson, NCES and Carol L. Rohr, Pinkerton Computer Consultants. Standard errors for the Issue Brief and additional information about the Schools and Staffing Survey and Recent College Graduates Survey are available upon request. Contact the Special Surveys and Analysis Branch, National Center for Education Statistics, 555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20208-5651, (202) 219-1325.

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